

## In The RELIGIOUS WORLD

### A WOMAN'S WAR SONG.

The International Sunday School Lesson for January 10 is "Deborah and Barak Deliver Israel."—Judg. 4:1-23; 5:1-22.

(WILLIAM T. ELLIS.)

If leaders in the modern women's movement knew their Bibles better we should hear oftener of the first feminist in history, Deborah the prophetess and emancipator. It is true that Miriam, the sister of Moses, broke forth into song upon one triumphant occasion, but the next eminent woman who figures in the Bible story, Deborah, really led and inspired her people over a course of years, during the troubled period of the judges. The master stroke that won them liberty was of her devising and execution, and it was she who composed the wonderful psalm of rejoicing which celebrated the event.

The husband might as well be called Mr. Deborah, for Lappidoth is merely mentioned as being the husband of the prophetess. Was it a hard role that he had to play in being merely the helpmeet of a public woman? Perhaps our own times will evolve a code for the man placed in this now common position.

Deborah was greater than her husband. The work to which she was called was one which could not be done through him; for not even the wisest wife can impart force of character, vision and the qualities of leadership to a man. So Deborah dared, in a period when usage prescribed sequestration and a secondary place for her sex, to translate into action her great ideals for her people.

#### The Women Who Lead.

Britain had her Boadicea, France her Joan of Arc, Germany her Queen Louise, America her Lucretia Mott, Susan B. Anthony and Francis Willard. All down the highway of history we see shining occasional women who, when men's hearts failed or their eyes were dimmed, rose to the role of leaders and deliverers. In the great emergencies of America's pioneer days, and of the War Between the States, women by the hundreds proved themselves heritors of the highest traditions of womanly heroism.

What is the most characteristic quality of womanhood, if it is not insight, vision, idealism and a high loyalty? Who feels a nation's wrongs so keenly as its women? Who are flaming pioneers of all social reforms but women? Why are they foremost in the missionary and temperance enterprise?

Soul-sensitiveness explains it. That quality made Deborah a seer and a propagandist. She had greatness and fineness of spirit. Justice and patriotism were really master passions with her. Every wrong done to her oppressed countrymen by the proud and cruel Canaanites entered her heart as a sword. Her loyalty to Jehovah, and her zeal for him, made her great. In a dark day when the ordained ecclesiastical leaders proved futile, she led her people back to God.

So Deborah moved from the land of Issachar south to that of Benjamin, where she would be free to counsel and confer. This suggests a word about the geography of the story; and present world events are newly teaching people the importance of geography. The scene of the battle lies back of Mt. Carmel, that long "mountain of a thousand valleys" by the sea, where the modern city of Haifa, with its German colony, its harbor and its terminus of the Damascus Railway is now situated. The scene of the defeat of Sisera is about the same as that of the slaughter of the priests of Baal, after Elijah's dramatic contest on Mt. Carmel. To the eastward, almost in a line with the Lake of Galilee, rose symmetrical Mt. Tabor, which figures in the story as the resort of Barak's army. Issachar, Deborah's home lay directly south, but she went still further southward, almost to Jerusalem, to a spot between Bethel and Ramah to establish herself as a prophetess to whom the people could resort for counsel and inspiration.

Then, under the palm tree by the door of her tent, Deborah sat and received her people. The picture is suggestive. A proud woman, of finely chiselled features, with the reserved demeanor of a greatly burdened soul, she sat day by day and received deputations in every-increasing numbers, as her reputation grew. Family strife and village quarrel were adjudicated by her. The stream of victims of Canaanite oppression brought their woes to her. The perplexed herds of communities, driven desperate by injustice piled upon injustice, conferred with this patriotic, widevisioned woman. Into all the Hebrew nation were carried her words of patriotism

and religion. She lighted anew the fires of loyalty to the dream of Abraham and to the covenant-keeping Jehovah. By lifting aloft the common ideals, she created once more something akin to a true national sentiment.

#### When The Hour Struck.

Long Deborah had been firing some hearts and restraining others. Patriots must have patience. Slowly but inevitably the time ripened to the hour of deliverance. The arrogance and high-handedness of the Canaanites grew worse and worse. The very national life of Israel was threatened. All the while the alliance of the Jews grew stronger. This wonderful woman bound to herself, by confidence in her judgment and patriotism, the natural leaders of her people.

At last the hour struck for which the patriots had prayed and prepared. Deborah sent the word to brave Barak, up in Kedesh-Naphtali, to rally the ten thousand true men of Naphtali and Sebulun to Mt. Tabor, and she would by means not divulged, draw forth Sisera to battle and defeat.

Right here Barak proved himself a man of first grade, for he was willing to take second place. He agreed to the plan proposed, provided only that Deborah herself would lead the host into battle. This meant resigning the glory of the defeat of Sisera into a woman's hand. But Barak was that sort of true patriot who puts the common cause above personal glory.

Barak realized that the host would follow famous Deborah whom they knew as the oracle of God. She, to be utterly fair to him, with frank words, remained the leader of the ten thousand that he was relinquishing into the hands of a woman the credit for a memorable victory. Sisera's defeat was sure, and famous would be that leader before whom he should fall. Barak was willing to have his own fame obscured, if thereby the enemy of his people might be conquered.

#### A Cowardly Captain and a Cruel Woman.

War, our saddened hearts now realize, is not very different today from what it has always been, except that it is somewhat more deadly. The clash of man with man, in a struggle of death, is essentially the same in France and Poland today as it was when the host of Deborah and Barak swept down from symmetrical Tabor upon the chariots and horsemen of Sisera in the great plain of Esdraelon below.

By some providence which is not made clear: "The Lord discomfited Sisera and all his chariots," and the Israelites were given a complete and overwhelming victory. Evidently from the Song of Deborah, the river Kishon, a trifling stream ordinarily, overflowed its banks in a sudden storm and the chariots were engulfed or so sorely hindered that they could not fight.

As for the famous captain of the Canaanites, Sisera proved himself somewhat less than a hero. Instead of staying by his troops to the end, and dying like a brave general, he slipped out from the melee and sought to save his own life by ignominious flight. History is full of shameful episodes like this, of great leaders who, in a crisis, prove pusillanious, prizing their own safety above honor and duty. Sisera's message to the youth of today is to learn to die nobly, rather than to live cowardly.

Had he died or been captured like a brave soldier Sisera would have escaped the ignominious end which was his, a fate like that of a wild animal. In his flight, he came to a Bedouin encampment. The tents were those of a party of neutral Kenites. The men were all absent, and the rigid etiquette of the time and the people demanded that Sisera should pass by the unprotected households. In his womanly terror, he committed the folly and offence of seeking to hide in the women's quarters of Heber's tent. Jael, the wife, quick of wit, resorted to guile. She welcomed him, fed him from the goatskin full of curdled milk, and when he fell swiftly into the sleep of utter exhaustion, she slew him.

A foul deed was Jael's. Clever commentators have tried to explain away, on the grounds of Sisera's violation of the desert code, and on the basis of Jael's loyalty to Israel, her cruel and monstrous act, in driving a tent peg through the temple of the sleeping guest. We know that the Orient does not have our standards of a fair fight; I have seen men scratching, biting or kicking each other; and we also know that cruelty is commoner in the East. Nevertheless, the deed was fiendish, even if it did serve the welfare of the Chosen People, and consummate the victory of Barak. Making all allowance for the standard of the times, there are some acts that cannot be condoned; exactly as all the

subtle apologists in Europe cannot explain away certain undoubted offenses against civilization in the present war.

#### The Battle Song of Victory.

Like so much of the Bible, the Song of Deborah is best interpreted in the light of the usages of the East. Once, down along the Tigris river, I had put to confusion a petty Turkish official, and my old raftsmen (I called him "Hamlet," because he was such a melancholy Dane) lifted up his cracked voice and in a long and boastful recitative tune sang the triumph as if it had been one of Alexander's victories. That is the custom in Bible lands today, as for thousands of years past. Every Arab skirmish produces a crop of epics. Your western poet must chew a penholder for a time ere he can produce a little verse; but your Arab, with the swing and vigor and stateliness of Deborah's psalm, will improvise his poetry for every occasion. Every village and tribe has its poet laureate whose efficiency, relatively, is greater than that of Britain's.

A stately, noble song was that of Deborah, and worthy of close study. In it she not only sounded the note of triumph, and exulted in the fall of the foe, and rehearsed the events of the battle, and derided the craven Israelites who had skulked at home in the hour of need, but she also, and chiefly, set forth the majesty and might of Jehovah, as the real victor. The poem, like all true poetry, penetrated straightway to the heart of the matter, and in lofty strain, exalted the God who gave the victory.

Aside from its inherent interest, this great conquest over the Canaanites helped determine the solidarity of the Hebrew people. The event was a turning point in the history of Israel. Deborah stands, a regal figure, at a cross-roads in the life of her nation; and she upholds and represents the twin truths of patriotism and religion.

#### TEAM WORK FOR CHURCHES.

Terse Comments on the Uniform Prayer Meeting Topic of the Young People's Societies—Christian Endeavor, etc.—For January 10.—"Our Denominational Boards, and Our Relation to Them." 2 Cor. 8: 8-15.

By William T. Ellis.

How many Christians unitedly do a comprehensive service for the whole nation and the entire world? That is a big question, a difficult question, and a pressing question. All the temptation for a local church lies in the direction of parochialism. Church work suffers from smallness and self-centeredness. The problem is to relate every individual congregation and Christian to the broader work of the kingdom. The system of denominational boards that is in present use is admittedly imperfect. There is too much waste energy in it. It overlaps too greatly and overlooks too much. The national and international agencies are too many, and too seriously duplicated, owing to the nearly two hundred Protestant denominations in North America. A slow, strong, steady drift of our day is toward the reorganization of denominational boards, with a view to lessened expense and increased efficiency. Interest in these larger phases of Christian work is expected of all thoughtful church members.

Notwithstanding all their limitations and defects, denominational boards are the best means for securing an outreach of one's personality, influence and offerings. They represent the individual Christian in fields which he could not personally enter. In his behalf and at his behest, they work for him in ways in which he is not personally skilled. A diversified, constant and far-reaching ministry is possible to every church member through his denominational benevolent boards.

All boards are not of equal importance. The wise giver exercises discrimination in his support. If, by any method or for any reason, church members should acquire the habit of giving conventionally a lump sum of all benevolences, much of the joy and inspiration and effectiveness of giving would be lost. An intelligent study of church boards, their purpose, personnel and methods, is really the duty of every discriminating church member.

Seldom are the long-established church boards as sensational in their appeals as certain independent organizations. The very word "undenominational" sounds alluring to many persons. The result has been that large sums are contributed to agencies which are irresponsible and relatively ineffective, being strong only in the money-raising end. Candid words need to be spoken about this. Every unbiased investigation of which I have knowledge has shown that the cheapest, the best administered and the most effective form of missionary work is that under the care of the great denominational boards. These latter are thoroughly responsible; and amenable to the givers. Through the church courts they may be brought to book at any time. Over independent philanthropies there is no control.

A devoted giver, plus a church board, is the fulfillment of the command to go "into all the world."

One by one old church leaders are dying off. Where are their successors? There is always a call for young men will give thought and time to

the larger concerns of the kingdom. The two principal qualifications are a sincere and intelligent interest in Christ's work in all its aspects; and a quality of sober judgment, bred by zeal.

Boards are bridges across the gulf of isolation which surrounds many Christian lives.

Through his church boards, a Christian speaks with authority upon living questions of social service, national welfare and Christian needs.

A group of suggestive thoughts upon the topic is the following from Amos P. Wells:

"Our board of foreign missions enormously lengthened our arm, and enables us to work at the same time in many distant parts of the earth."

"His board of home missions stands at the right hand of every Christian patriot, and does what he longs to do for his dear country."

"Your denominational Sunday school board enables you to pay your debt for all the Sunday school has meant to you."

"Your denominational publication board spreads the truth for which your denominational stands. If you believe it, you want others to believe it."

"What banks and checks do for the transmission of money and the spread of commerce our denominational boards do for the transmission of influence and the promotion of the King's business."

"You remember the fable of the sticks that could be broken easily when separate, but not at all when tied together in a bundle. Our denominational boards tie us into a bundle."

"As a disease that will spread over the entire body may start in a very small part of the body, so an insignificant member of a denomination may start a malady that will spread over the entire body of the churches."

"A country store may be managed by one man, but a big city department store must have boards of managers. To object to denominational boards is to wish for a very little denomination."

#### SEVEN SENTENCE SERMONS.

He who has not been a servant cannot become a praiseworthy master.—Plato.

We need to guard against making a show of our praying, talking about it.—J. B. Hiller.

Zeal and duty are no slow, but on occasion's forelock watchful wait.—Milton.

In the deepest night of trouble and sorrow God gives us so much to be thankful for that we need never cease our singing.—Coleridge.

The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit: A broken and contrite heart, O God, thou wilt not despise.—Ps. 51: 17.

Less, less of self each day.

And more, my God, of Thee:

Oh, keep me in the way,

However rough it be.

—Bonar.

He who freely praises what he means to purchase, and he who enumerates the faults of what he means to sell, may set up a partnership with honesty.—Lavater.

#### PRICKLY CONSCIENCE EASED.

"Never Built for a Criminal," Says Man Who Asserts He's a Thief.

Kansas City Star.

"Do I feel sorry that I gave myself up to the police to atone for my past crimes? Well, I should say not! I have felt better the last few hours I've been in jail than I have felt in the past ten years."

That is how a young man who gave the name of Charles Flax feels since he walked into police headquarters and told Capt. Thomas P. Flahive that he had led a life of crime for ten years.

"I was never built for a criminal," he said. "The first offense I ever committed hurt my conscience, and I gave myself up. That was ten years ago when I was only 15 years old. I stole some money from my father and ran away. When the money was spent I felt sorry and told the police about it. I would not tell my name until I had served two months in a reformatory. I felt better then and told them who my father was. He immediately took me home."

"I have held up men, both on the street and in stores, stole money from injured persons while an orderly at the General Hospital, robbed the men for whom I worked, and even stole from my friends. While engaged in the commission of the acts my conscience did not bother me, but afterward—then is when I suffered. I would become despondent after committing a crime and want to give myself up to atone for my wrongs, but usually my love of liberty would get the better of me."

The late John Alvah Blaisdell, of East Lebanon, Me., lived on his farm without a human companion for more than 40 years, but had, at times, 18 or 20 cats. He read every newspaper he could get, and is said to have read every book in the East Rochester library, and some of them three or four times.